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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WEATHER RECORDS IN COURT

Some years ago a German meteorologist, Dr. Carl Kassner, published a good-sized book on the uses of weather reports and weather information in court proceedings; a branch of applied science that might be called "meteorological jurisprudence." There is almost no end to the variety of evidence concerning weather that is presented in trials and lawsuits; hence the official weather services in all countries are constantly called upon for information with which to verify or refute the statements of witnesses on that subject.

In the United States not a day passes on which the Weather Bureau is not called upon to supply certified copies of weather records for use in legal proceedings or on which the officials in charge of some of the Bureau's 200 stations are not summoned personally to court to testify about weather. Here is a typical case:

Some years ago a woman in Detroit sued the city for damages as the result of a fall on the street. She claimed that the accident, which happened at night in the middle of January on a specified date, was caused by flagstones that had been removed from the pavement by order of the city council, and that she had stumbled over the stones and then slipped in a puddle of rainwater. The records of the weather station showed that the temperature on the date in question ranged from 2 to 19 above zero and that neither rain nor snow had recently fallen. The complainant lost her case.

In a large number of cases evidence is sought bearing on the question of visibility and the possibility of recognizing persons at a certain distance. Others relate to such matters as wet or dry clothing, footsteps in snow or mud, etc.

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